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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000350

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, NEA/REA, DRL/HDP, NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: (C) TIP: KUWAITI EFFORT TO HELP REPATRIATE DOMESTICS

Classified By: CDA FRANK URBANCIC; REASON: 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Indonesia is working with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the Indonesian Embassy to expedite repatriation of domestic servants stranded in Kuwait, and to ensure payment of wages owed to them. He hopes to be able to extend this initiative to Filipinas. In many cases, the only reason for repatriation is end of contract, but most claim unpaid wages for periods ranging from one to 38 months. A substantial number claim to have been beaten by their employers. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Charge received a phone call January 28 from Mohammed al-Khalaf, Kuwait's Ambassador to Indonesia, who is currently in Kuwait. Khalaf said he was taking initiative to work with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to try to help stranded domestic servants, and invited the Embassy to learn more about this initiative. Polchief therefore met with Khalaf and KRCS Chairman Barges al-Barges on January 29. Barges stressed that KRCS is not a governmental entity, but is devoted to helping those in need, regardless of nationality or religion. During Ramadhan, KRCS had provided meals to some 250 Indonesian and 150 Filipina domestic servants who had sought shelter in their respective embassies due to problems with their employers.

3. (C) During the January 29 meeting, Khalaf and Barges examined a printout, evidently produced by the Indonesian Embassy, listing 216 Indonesian domestics who wished to return home. For 81 of them, no complaint was listed other than "end of contract." Virtually all the others claimed their employers owed them back wages, for periods ranging from one month to 38 months. Several also claimed their employers had beaten them; only one, as far as Polchief could tell, claimed attempted sexual assault. A quick guesstimate by KRCS indicated that at an average monthly wage equivalent to about USD100, the claimed back wages would total USD135,000 (i.e. average ten months per person). This was far more than they had imagined, and more than the KRCS budget could absorb, so they planned to seek payment by the employers. (COMMENT: the only way to make that square with prompt repatriation would be for the women to fly home first, and be paid later -- something they may be very reluctant to do. END COMMENT.)

4. (C) Arrangements were in process with the Kuwaiti Air Force to repatriate some 170 of these domestics during the second week of February (shortly after Eid al-Adha), at about 70 passengers per flight. Khalaf hoped that domestics of other nationalities, notably Filipinas, would also be able to benefit from this service.

5. (C) Khalaf (protect) offered his personal opinion as to steps needed to gain control of the problem of exploited/abused domestics, which he said was a constant drain on his time and on Kuwait's bilateral relationship with Indonesia:

- tighten control over the recruiting agencies, both in Kuwait and source countries;
- promote awareness in the source countries, so that would-be domestics know their rights;
- shift responsibility for domestics from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (because Interior has "a police mentality, not a humanitarian mentality").

6. (C) COMMENT: That a Kuwaiti ambassador has felt the need to take such an initiative is both encouraging (a sign of growing awareness and responsiveness) and disappointing (reflecting the absence of a concerted GOK response). That Amb. Khalaf turned to the US Embassy indicates that our publicized concern about trafficking in persons is increasingly known and understood in